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An In-house Translator's Experience with Machine Translation

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With the expansion of MT usage at TransPerfect, we have developed an implementation strategy that involves continuous work with linguists on a wide variety of MT-related tasks. Today, MT undeniably plays a big role in translators' lives. As an internal linguist at TransPerfect, I have experienced it in my everyday work. A big part of it is now related to MT and these tasks include not only MT post-editing, but also MT evaluation and improvement.

I remember when MT was first introduced as a new task for the internal linguists: the transition was smoother for some of us than for others. As to my personal experience, at first I was rather sceptical. This is because I used to think that MT post-editing (MTPE) was rather similar to proofreading, but worse: instead of correcting human mistakes, I would need to correct the mistakes of a machine. However, after having gained some experience my view has changed. Now I see MTPE more like a regular translation task, where in addition to TM matches and other useful resources, I have at my disposal suggestions from the MT. I am free to delete them and retranslate the segment from scratch if I think they are not useful. While in proofreading, I just correct someone else's translation, in MTPE I am the author of the final translation product and I am fully free to create it the way I choose.

The most difficult part of MTPE, in my opinion, is to decide when it is better to use a segment partially or in full and when to re-translate it from scratch. At first it takes time, but it is a matter of practice: right now it takes me only a couple of seconds to decide whether I should or should not correct a particular MT segment.

I specifically enjoy being able to spot and "fix" the MT errors that I spent the most time correcting. All the linguists who work on post-editing jobs for TransPerfect report back to our MT developers feedback and inform them of the frequent and systematic MT errors they would

like to be fixed. Their feedback is then implemented in the MT system. In this way, the post-editing time is continuously decreasing. This feedback is the most efficient way to improve the systems. Providing useful feedback is not so easy at first, one has to understand how the system works and what kind of feedback can be implemented. In addition, one has to have an analytical mindset, be able to identify patterns and systematic errors and generalize. This is a skill that can be acquired and improved with practice.

For me, this is the most fascinating aspect of working with MT. I like seeing how the system produces a better output each time and takes into account the feedback I have provided. I like being a part of the developments in MT and other Artificial Intelligence applications for language, as I believe it has great potential to make our way of working more interesting.

Our profession is constantly evolving thanks to the emergence of new technologies. One of them is neural MT and we can already observe how it influences the way we perform post-editing. These systems are different in the way they function and the type of errors they make. While providing improved fluency, they are prone to committing errors that are not very common for phrase-based systems, such as word omissions. That is why it is important for linguists to be aware what systems they are using, keep track of the latest developments and have the necessary expertise.

Efficient work and constant collaboration with linguists is essential for both MT development and testing, i.e. for successful MT implementation. Our internal linguists are MT experts and all of them have gone through extensive training on MT technologies and post-editing. Training and preparation of linguists is as important as taking into consideration their suggestions for improvement of the MT workflow and the MT quality.